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A

# Memorial Tribute

TO THE

REV. THOMAS SNELL, D. D.,

OFFERED AT HIS BURIAL,

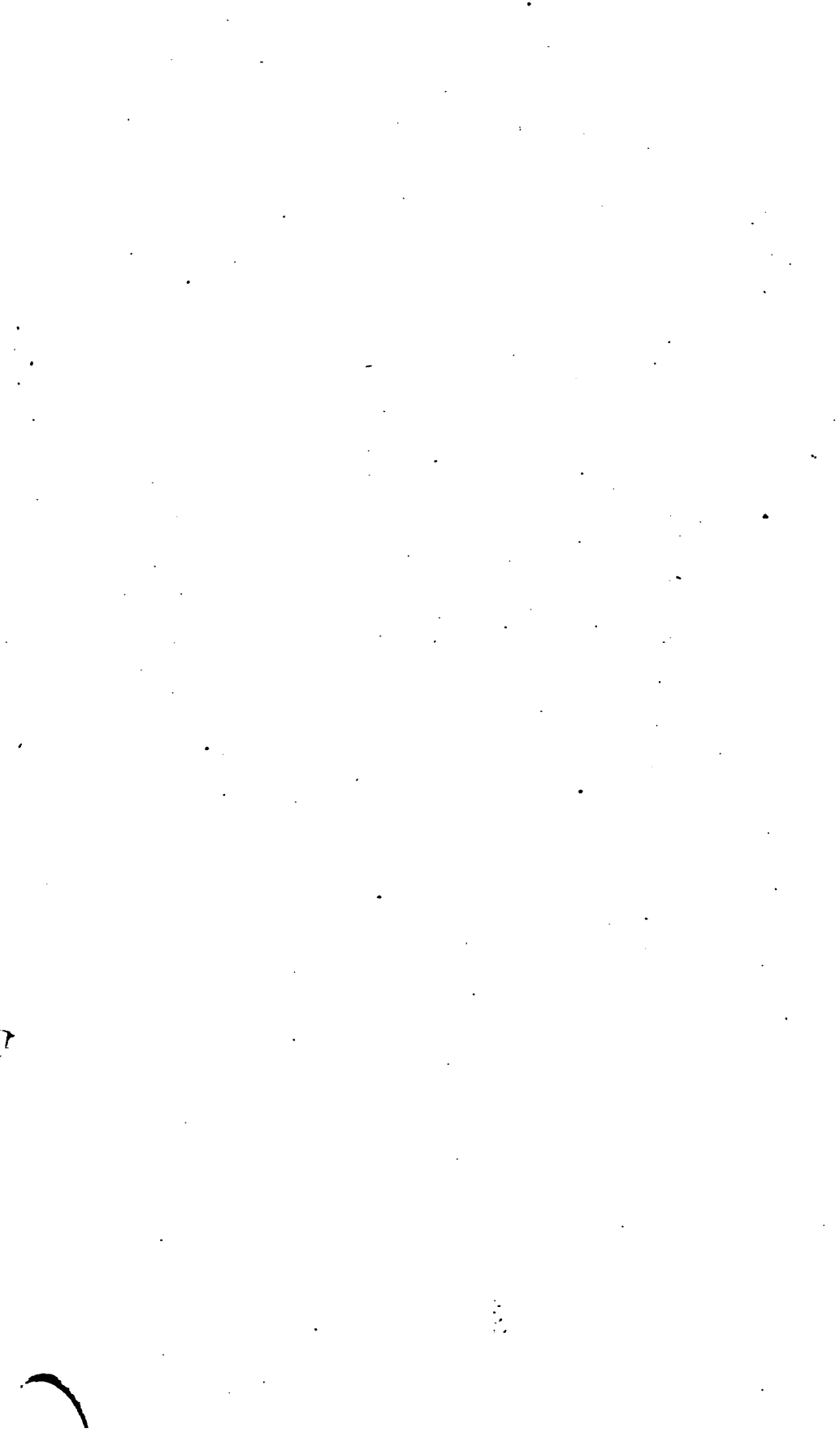
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BY REV. LYMAN WHITING,  
PROVIDENCE, R. I.

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1862.



Memorial Tribute

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## MEMORIAL TRIBUTE.

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Through tears we look to-day, on a loved form resting in the house of God on its way to the Tomb. A love long proved, and very tender, recalls the saying of the ancients, that “the finest hues of character are not seen till death has set its colors, and arrested the elements of change in it.”

On this bier repose the remains of a man of God, known for above three-score years as a minister of Christ through this circle of towns; and to be known through many more years to come, as a chosen pillar of witness, in his day, among them all.

The faithful and minute recital of the life-events of the deceased, in the Discourse just pronounced, leaves for me the preferred service of an affectionate *Memorial Tribute*, to the spiritual father, guide, counsellor and friend of all my years. He, whom in my father's house, in the sanctuary and by the way-side, I was taught to have in reverence above any other living man,—whose pious care and personal counsels early guided me to the Lamb of God,—whose hand set the seal of baptism on my brow, and from whose lips the covenant between me and this church, was heard in my early youth; claims of me, and of great numbers here of like experience, a pious tribute.



He, too, examined at my Licensure,—gave the Apostolic charge at the Ordination, and after, installed by prayer; then, in many paternal intimacies and precious counsels through many years, weaving endearments about the heart which the grave cannot extinguish,—he justly claims and should not be denied a *filial* tribute among our last loving duties to the mortal remains.

My purpose will be pursued through a brief portraiture, as these forty years I have known him, supply the features. The sketch may be in the physical, mental, and spiritual characteristics, which were more obvious.

Tradition harmoniously tells of his *youthful form*, as slender, graceful, erect and uncommonly pleasing;—the full, open face wearing a gleam of mingled mirth and friendly will;—the German cross in his ancestry, plainly assured by the clear skin, blue eye, and rounded brow. These marks accompanied him indeed to full manhood, ripening into a dignity and affection of aspect not often equalled. His prime came early and lasted long. A portrait at his thirtieth, would not have been disowned by one at his sixtieth year. The generation who bury him, have seen the erect, manful, courteous form, our fathers admired. His rare temperance, sobriety, cleanliness, conscientious promptness and uniformity of action, preserved well the fairness of form, and dignity of mien. Four-score years did not bow the frame, nor rob it of the pleasing, friendly dignity it had worn in its best estate.

*The mental qualities, were eminently ACQUISITIVE.* Ability to learn, love of study, I think, marked the boyhood, as

they were efficient in the manhood. His mind made firm grasps on knowledge, and so naturally chose knowledge which would bear such grasps. He did not gain fanciful, or merely popular knowledge, readily. His mental tastes preferred the substantial and fundamental.

The *speculative* powers were not a very noticeable force in the mental constitution. The visible energy of mind, was in distinct acquirement, and use of it, in simple, natural and approved forms. Speculations, empirical or radical modes of thought, were almost unknown to him. Strongly constructive, original, or powers evolving fresh forces from knowledge, or combining it in forms before unseen, did not distinguish him. Plain, solid acquirements, and the direct, sensible, and often finely logical forms, in lucid, and sometimes very forcible statement, was rather the distinction. The mental features of his ministry were more the argumentative, and reasoning, than the illustrative or appellatory modes. He inclined to analyze, to seek causes and trace to sources, till he reminded you at times of a patient, earnest philosopher. He had indeed, a large store of common sense, self-acquired, practical philosophies. In journeys with him, his companions frequently found high entertainment from these.

THE SPIRITUAL FEATURES bore traces very distinctly of an early home-piety, of a home of truth, of purity, of steady affections. Affection was a grand passion in him. His youthful life doubtless had a sprightliness, amounting to genial gayety and social mirthfulness;—but the steady piety of his home so attempered these dispositions and schooled

the habits, that the transition to personal godliness was less marked than is common. Religious life did not begin in a convulsion of the moral powers, nor did it proceed like a path amid mountain ridges.

No early impieties, no youthful dissipations or wayward infidelities, furrowed the young soul;—no blighting vices scarred it, or vile habits distorted and disfigured it—so as to make the after growths of piety ungainly and erratic. Between the moral and the religious states, the contrast was not enough indeed, for his after “comfort of hope.” He had not suffered enough from early blindness, to feel, as some do, the force of “now I see.” He had never chewed the husks with the starving prodigal, so as to know as many do, the sweetness of the bread in the Father’s house. Violent forces, left fewer traces in his spiritual nature, than in that of most men; surely in persons so eminent as himself. The spiritual life was dutiful, devout, constant, self-inspective, rather than ardent, or variable. It went into no extacies; it sank into few glooms. *Duty* was a term into which the highest feeling could expand itself, and the lowest religious impulse, did not escape its claim. *Duty*, not *feeling*,—*doing*, not *dreaming* good acts, occupied the life. Seated convictions, rather than temporary impulses, supplied the staple for the spiritual action. “*I shall do my DUTY cost what it may,*” was his rejoinder in a very exciting contest. More fervor of character would have heightened some, and beautified nearly all the admirable and symmetrical forces seen in this noble, very complete *Christian man*.

Out of these varied and rare faculties, his POWER AS A PREACHER, came as a natural and happy combination of them all. With pleasing dignity, like a "prince in Israel," we remember his ascent through the sanctuary, up the sacred desk. A careful, quiet, self-assured attitude marked his rising and presentation to the assembly. Then how often we heard—"with reverence and godly fear," as an early utterance in his worship of God. The words disclosed his soul. He felt reverent. He drew out that feeling from any bosom possessing it. He won respect usually, sooner than interest, in the pulpit. The whole bearing and action impressed at once a hallowed respect, and that being gained, a serious, conceding interest followed. What fancy hearers term a "great sermon," he seldom preached; a mean, puerile, unworthy one, never. The evenness of his spiritual life, was the pattern for his pulpit preparations.

In two distinct fields his preaching was habitually effective.

(1.) *On the Government of God*;—a theme visible in statement, or in the working of his thought in almost any message he uttered. The Supreme, Infinite, and Adorable Jehovah; the divine glory, justice and holiness, sat plainly enthroned upon his thoughts.

(2.) On the Homiletic side;—*Consistent Christian Character*,—was the favorite, and representative phrase. Under it, the duties of the Christian life as between God and man, and between man and man,—the common, every-day duties of honesty, industry, frugality, temperance, chastity, family government, and such like, were pressed with a frank-

ness which often came near to bluntness, and with a pungency, which a guilty hearer was very likely to feel as personal. During the last twenty years of his preaching, these consistent-Christian-character duties, had, I think, a more frequent, and effective enforcement here, than in any pulpit known to me. The confiding and affectionate feeling of the people, after the great revival of 1831, gave to him a species of patriarch's permission to speak of private life as few could do. He had so long and faithfully loved and tended the flock, and they so loved and confided in him, that no mode of daily life on which Christian duty could be enforced, seemed to be forbidden ground to him. The tender affectionateness between pastor and people at that period, was of a higher, more settled character than is often seen. It was the serene, rich Indian summer of his year. His own life and that of his household, had so illustrated those duties that his preaching bore the unction of a hallowed lifetime, and was exceedingly precious to his flock.

The financial overturns in this very prosperous town, brought temptations, and trials specially needing such ministrations. After a sermon one Fast Day, in which extravagance in dress, style of living and consequent dishonesty as to just debts had been sharply rebuked, a merchant said: "If that sermon had been preached ten years ago, it would have saved me ten thousand dollars of bad debts."

Yet the doctrinal modes of truth,—not in elaborate, theological essays, but in obvious persuasive forms,—were the

favorite staple of his preaching. His hearers both at home, and when found in other churches, by removal,—are witnesses in their stability, discrimination, and ready activity in Christian labor, to his skill and efficient success in infusing the foundation truths of the blessed gospel by his preaching.

As before indicated, the spheres of speculation, of theological curiosity, or even the inviting margins of unsettled and tentative opinions, seldom felt the pressure of his diligent foot. Neither the fascinating discriminations of new theologies, nor the abnormal, mystic, and half lunatic phases of Christian experience ever beguiled him. The straight and tried path, consistently, diligently kept, was his chosen way. He led others in the path he trod himself. No pious hearer will be found, I think, who long sat under his preaching without feeling a conscious progress in spiritual clearness of apprehension as to the fundamental truths of the gospel.

The profuse biblical element in his preaching, was chiefly in the more evident forms, and aspects of the Divine Word. He was careful, almost to shyness, of acutely critical hermeneutics. The princely labors of modern biblical scholarship were not as fairly in his reach, as in that of men educated at a later day, yet what we term "modern learning" was sometimes visible in his treatment of Scripture, but his furnishment in this respect was not a distinction. The plain, convincing sense, rather prevailed in his use of Scripture.

Special mention should be made of a favorite, and most useful series of scriptural studies which he brought out

as "Biblical Lectures." He began them in the winter of 1831 and '32. They were familiar, running explanations of selected historic portions of the Old Testament—out of which he drew most pertinent, often ingenious, and sharply practical "instructions." These, I think, were the noblest side-work of his ministry. For nearly twenty years he kept his hand upon it—and his affectionate assiduity in this extra labor, won the hearts of the people to an intense esteem,—at least through the earlier portion of those years. They were his Sabbath evening or "third service"—as he called it—subjects. They originally proceeded in some serial, or chronological order, and were presented in an almost conversational ease and familiarity of language. They wrought, it seems to me, a change in the style of all his preaching. From that time, his sermons became more lively,—less formal and scholastic. His style was loosened, and a fuller range of thought, and closer pressure upon the lives and feelings of men, won upon the affectionate interest of the hearers, the young especially, in a remarkable manner. Indeed, it has sometimes seemed, that a new, and the brightest era of his ministry began then. Visitations of the Holy Ghost were enjoyed in most cheering frequency and fulness, the dews of divine favor keeping his leaf green and the fruit in his vine abundant, to a later period than is often seen. The town at that period was gathering, by its prosperous manufactures, many young men from the States north of this. The interest and affection the pastor, now past mid-life, awakened in them was very remarkable.

“How do you explain the singular interest and affection of young people toward you?” I once asked him as we journeyed together. After some reflection he replied, “When I was young I had a great reverence and interest for aged persons, and those mature in life. The affection of the young toward me, is my recompense perhaps.”

We cannot fail to notice here a peculiarity of his sympathetic nature, seldom found so manifest as in him, and which while it won affection to him, sometimes interfered with the effect of his emotional power. It was this:—strong emotion would speedily flood his own soul, and often quite arrest his utterance, so that before the impulse had sent its sympathetic wave over the assembly, it would submerge him, and fail to reproduce itself in them. His own heart moved and melted, before there was time for the dissolving force to do its like work on the hearers.

A memorable instance of it occurred in his New Year's Sermon, January, 1832. The blessed revival of the year then passed, filled his soul with unusual and tender joy. He had written from an overflowing heart, his tribute to the sovereign grace which had so marked the year. The numerous converts, some of his own children among them, and the rejoicing people of God before him, were in liveliest sympathy with his thought, but when he came to rehearse his record, the emotion rose upon him. His voice sank under the words. He paused. He began again, and again the trembling tongue lost its power. The heart was gushing too strongly and tenderly for the lips. The struggle became



almost painful to witness, and the sympathy of the hearers turned from the *message* which melted the speaker, to the *distress* it gave him to utter it. In times of deep religious feeling, similar instances of emotion overpowering him, before it had wrought on the audience, will be remembered by many. They disclosed a heart that yearned like a father's, and thrilled like a mother's, toward his beloved flock.

Time fails to accompany him in his walks of *pastoral duty*;—to relate how joyfully his approach was discerned, and his alighting welcomed, and his beaming, liquid eye and friendly tones, rejoiced in. Courtesy and kindness, dignity and gentleness, the happy blending of gravity and gayety, of sympathy and instruction, made his household visitations, treasures for family recollections. In a season of very sore sickness in my father's house, the calm, firm, condoling hopefulness conveyed by one of his visits, seemed to form a point for recovery to begin, among the prostrate sufferers. His words and tones were ever as balm to the wounded, and his countenance as day-dawn to those "walking in darkness." As remembered in his prime of manhood, few men ever equalled him in benignant, wholesome and impressive pastoral visitation. The direct, spiritual quickening from it, may not have been as marked as the other qualities, but it sometimes transcended all other influences.

But, fellow mourners, his work for us is done. Ours for him must soon end. His last word and look for us, have past. Our last sight of his mortal features is at hand. We must go to him—he can come no more to us. That upright

form, and manly step, and courteous salute, we shall admire no more. His clear, persuasive conclusions, no more will engage our convictions, or determine our resolves. His even, consistent and beautiful Christian life passes from sight, though its impress may linger in our affectionate remembrance. The sanctuary, the household will know him no more. You, his surviving children, will cherish the hearthstones and the aged elms around which are traced the memories of the infancy and childhood, he made so choice by culture, and so precious by home endearments. In your life *with* him, will long be found priceless consolation, now he has gone from you.

Beside the lovely and loved companion of his youth and of all his active days, he shall lie down to "sleep in Jesus," waiting the coming of his and of her Lord. The songs of birds, and the scent of spring flowers accompany him to his rest,—fit emblems of the new song he lifts before the throne, and of the bloom he shall wear, in the paradise of God.

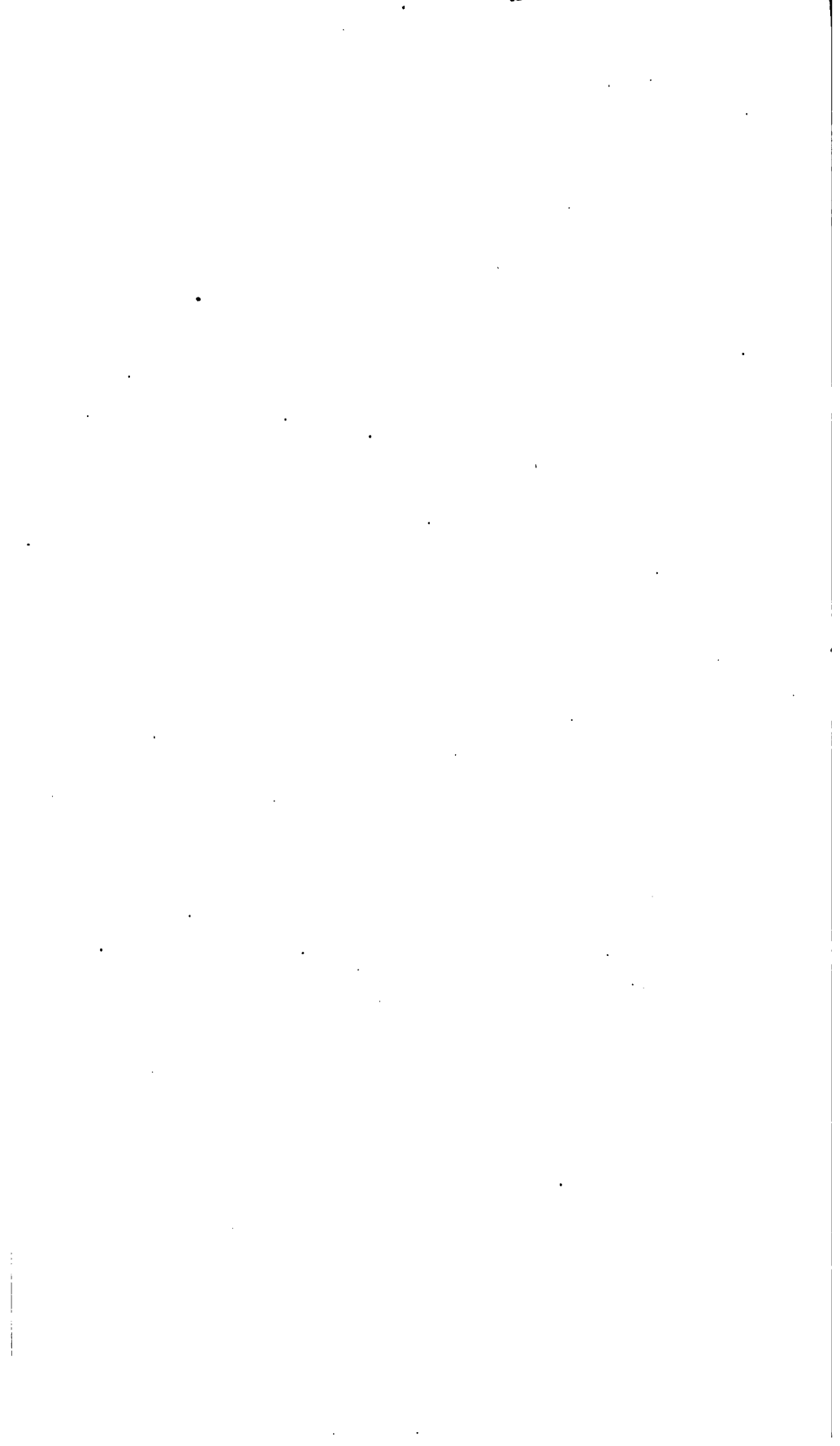
We are glad he may sleep among the generation to whom he spake of heaven "and led the way,"—numbers of whom were shown by him to "behold the Lamb of God," or were fashioned into the Saviour's image by his ministry; alike to be seals of his labor and the crown of his rejoicing—"in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming."

Servant of God, well done!

Rest from thy loved employ;

The battle fought, the victory won,

*Enter thy Master's joy."*











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